

December 15, 2009

WASHINGTON, DC-U.S. Senator Charles E. Schumer and U.S. Congressman Michael Arcuri today urged New York State grant funding to Oneida County's sewer district and Utica's sewer system when they decide funding for projects through the federally funded Clean Water State Revolving Fund. The aging sewer systems in Oneida County and in Utica are in desperate need of repair and threaten the economic and environmental health of the entire region. Under state order, the cost to fix the Oneida County sewer systems is estimated at over \$150 million, with a similar amount to upgrade the Utica system. Paying for the projects would place a crushing burden on homeowners, ratepayers and businesses.

In October, Senator Schumer and Congressman Arcuri reversed decades of federal neglect and successfully inserted language into the final Interior Appropriations Bill to provide a billion dollars in grants - not loans - to financially strapped communities across the country to repair and replace aging water and sewer infrastructure. This was in addition to hundreds of millions Schumer and Arcuri delivered to the state received via the stimulus bill to fund vital state water-sewer projects. In the final bill, Congress allocated more than \$3.5 billion to replace and repair aging sewer and water infrastructure; also, no less than 30 percent of the funds will be made available as grants instead of loans, directing more than \$100 million in grants to localities across New York State. Funding the upgrades will create jobs, stimulate economic growth and improve the environmental health of the region.

In an effort to protect taxpayers from bearing the entire burden for the cost of fixing the sewer-water system, and to protect the economic and environmental health of the entire region, Schumer and Arcuri are urging the state to make these projects top priorities as they distribute the funds from water and sewer funding bill that recently passed congress.

"It is vital that we provide resources to help Oneida and Utica upgrade their sewer systems so that cash-strapped residents are not forced to bear the burden of significant rate increases," **Schumer said**

. "Congressman Arcuri and I were able to secure a record amount of federal money for New York State, which will see a record-breaking amount of water and sewer funding next year - much of it to be given out to localities in grants, and not loans - and Oneida County and Utica must have their fair share. Making these investments now will create jobs, ensure long-term economic competitiveness, and provide clean drinking water to residents."

"Oneida County and Utica are required to make these sewer upgrades, but rate-payers in these communities simply cannot afford these necessary projects alone," **Arcuri said.**

"Working together with Senator Schumer and local officials, I will continue to fight to make sure that these projects receive funding from any possible source to begin these vital upgrades and protect the area's infrastructure for years to come."

In February of 2007, Oneida County was ordered by the state to immediately fix its sewer systems because heavy rain or snow thaw causes the system to overflow and discharge untreated sewage in the Mohawk River. Recently, the Oneida County Sewer District entered into a consent order with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) to improve its system by 2014. This will entail rehabilitating the sanitary sewer collection system, and upgrading the Sauquoit Creek Pumping Station, forcemain, and water pollution control plant. After a complete study of the problem, the cost for repairing the system had soared from \$66 million to at least \$150 million. Much of this cost could fall to the ratepayers in the sewer district -- many of whom are already slammed by high taxes and a severe economic downturn. In addition, the cost to the County could pose a threat to the overall economic health entire region, impeding growth and jobs across the Mohawk Valley.

Additionally, like many older cities, the City of Utica has a combined sewer overflow (CSO) system. During heavy rains, the system can overflow, discharging untreated sewage into the Mohawk River, posing environmental and public-health problems for the surrounding communities. The City is working to separate its storm-water and sanitary sewer systems and the estimated cost is another \$150 million.

In a push to bring much-needed federal dollars to the project, Schumer and Arcuri today wrote a personal letter to Environmental Facilities Corporation Acting President Matthew Millea, asking him to prioritize the Oneida sewer-water projects on the list of projects that could be funded with money from the NYS Environmental Facilities Corporation. Federal water and sewer funding is provided to the EFC, which then chooses the projects that will receive funding.

In the letter they wrote, "These sewer infrastructure projects are well-planned, shovel-ready, and critical to the investment in each municipality's future. As you review projects on the state's intended use plan, we urge that Oneida County and Utica's vital sewer infrastructure improvement projects be given the utmost consideration."